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SUBJECT: THAI PLANS ON DEPLOYMENT TO DARFUR

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¶1. (SBU) Pattarat Hongtong, Deputy Director of the Peace, Security and Disarmament Division at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told us September 25 that the MFA had recently received word that Sudan was close to agreeing to allow Thai troops to join UNAMID. The RTG still planned to deploy a battalion of peacekeeping troops to Darfur, but Pattarat cautioned that the long delay since the Thai Cabinet initially confirmed the pledge in October 2007 would cause a longer lead time for deploying the troops once Sudan and UNDPKO gave Thailand formal approval. As a result of the long interim, the RTG would now need to allocate a budget for the UNAMID deployment. The Thai military would also need to train a different battalion, since the battalion originally trained for the deployment had been rotated to other responsibilities, Pattarat said. As such, the RTG would likely need six months to prepare for deployment.

¶2. (SBU) We separately confirmed September 26 with Lieutenant Colonel Khajornsak Pullphothong, Section Chief of the Operations Division at the Peace Operations Center at the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters (RTArF), that the Thai military was planning to fulfill the pledge to UNAMID with a unit designated as Task Force 980 which would be a mechanized infantry battalion comprised of members drawn from all three services and the RTArF (note: Thai overseas deployments are usually composite units formed specially for the deployment). Military planners anticipated that the deployment would happen in March if the RTG received the approval to deploy soon. The RTArF was moving forward on preparations for deploying under the assumption that the RTG had already approved this deployment in 2007 and, notwithstanding political developments since, did not need to resubmit the issue to the Cabinet for reapproval.

¶3. (SBU) Regarding support, the RTArF told us that Thai peacekeepers would need assistance to deploy to Darfur, and that they planned for the United Nations to provide this assistance. The RTArF had not yet identified any other assistance that would be needed, but believed that the Thai battalion would have all necessary material and equipment for the deployment. RTArF was very concerned, however, about logistics within Sudan. The RTArF office had heard that a contingent from another country had arrived in Darfur in March, but the equipment for the unit had not yet moved from the port. Thailand would look to receive assurances from the UN that this problem had been fixed and would not occur again before the Thai deploy.

JOHN